

**Sermon for 17th June 2018 (Third Sunday after Trinity)**

**Jer. 7. 1–7; Ps. 39; Luke 7. 36 - 8. 3**

*May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Our story from Luke's gospel this evening is somewhat difficult for us in today's culture to understand. We are not in the habit of leaving our front door open and having uninvited guests coming in to join our dinner party! But neither would we as the host expect our principal guest to tell us off for not treating him properly! As we find throughout the gospel stories, strange and sometimes miraculous things happened when Jesus was around and when, as He and John the Baptist both declared, the kingdom of heaven had drawn near at hand. Our story starts with the bald statement that one of the Pharisees had asked Jesus to dine with him. Perhaps he was a fairly open-minded Pharisee who had heard the rumours that Jesus was a prophet and wanted to find out for himself by inviting Him into his house. And then he thought he had proved that Jesus could not be a prophet, because if he was he would have known that the woman who had come in off the street and was crying over his feet was a prostitute and he would have turned her away. But no, far from it. Jesus knew much more about this woman, that she was full of remorse for her past life, and full of love for Jesus. So Jesus now addressed the Pharisee, Simon, and asked him a simple question: which of two debtors would have more love for their creditor who cancelled their debts, the one who owed more or the one who owed less? When Simon gave the correct answer, Jesus then went on to point out to his host that he had not shown much love for his guest in the way he had welcomed Jesus in to his house, whereas the woman had shown great love by bathing his feet with her tears, kissing his feet ceaselessly, and anointing his feet with ointment. Jesus then sent the woman away with the blessing of forgiveness because of her faith. We are not told what happened to the Pharisee, Simon; we can only hope that he too benefited from the encounter.

This lack of love for their God was what the prophet Jeremiah was sent by Yahweh to warn the Judaeans about. They paid lip-service to the one true God by attending at the Temple in Jerusalem, but at the same time they sought after other gods; that is, they had ignored the first commandment, to have no other God but Yahweh. This failure to obey the commands of their God had already caused the downfall of the ten northern tribes of Israel and it was soon to result in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple that Solomon had built, with the ensuing exile to Babylon. Yes, a remnant of the Jews would be restored to Jerusalem and enabled to rebuild their city and the temple, but the difficulty remained, that of keeping faith with God as a whole people, acting justly one with another, not oppressing the alien, the orphan and the widow, not shedding innocent blood, and not going after other gods. Was the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 a more recent fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy of a return from exile? Israel has now become a strong militarised nation, determined to retain and if possible extend its power in and around Jerusalem. Who knows what the future holds, only God.

In the modern world we face the same kinds of difficulty. Do we pay lip-service to our faith by attending church while not truly loving God with heart and soul and mind and strength? Do we act justly one with another? Do we treat those worse off than ourselves - the immigrant, the disabled child, the elderly and infirm - with respect and dignity and generosity? Do we go after other gods - the gods of greed, riches, envy - rather than devote all our love in response to the God of love? None of us is perfect; so we all of us need to take a very hard look at ourselves from time to time to ensure that we are doing our best to follow our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, in showing the Father's love in all our thoughts and actions. When Jesus was teaching in the temple and being tested by the Sadducees and Pharisees, he was asked by a lawyer which was the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus answered: ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." That is the greatest, the first commandment. The second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Everything in the law and the prophets hangs on these two commandments.*** At some stage we will each one of us stand before God's judgement throne. To ensure that He then deals with us mercifully, we must take great care that our love for God and God's love in us for his creation and for our fellow human beings are foremost in our hearts and minds as we live our daily lives.

**To God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all honour, glory, might and power, tonight and for evermore. Amen.**